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ABSTRACT

In Parcells Middle School social studies students in grades seven and eight select a six-weeks course of study from the slate of classes available out of the forty developed around the areas of geography and United States history. Development of these units is based on the following principles: an open-ended, self renewing curriculum; the rights of youth in education; the legitimacy of different learning techniques for different children; the importance of making learned skills adaptive; the responsibility of schools in attitude formation; relieving teachers of the burden of having all the answers; and nongraded education. The elective program allows for selection of a particular course or an independent study as well as of a particular learning plan within the course consisting of a variety of learning activities in each plan. The program requires new uses of old space, a flexibility of programing that allows teachers to work alone, as teams, or as resource personnel, students contracting for the completion of courses, teachers acting as resource or planning agents, and a well-equipped multimaterials resource center complementing the move away from a one textbook format. (JH)

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INDIVIDUALIZED ELECTIVE PROGRAM

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by

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It is the beginning of a six-week period at Parcells Middle School in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and social studies students are planning their next six weeks of study. In a large group meeting they listen as social studies teachers describe the five units of study from which they may choose. After hearing about the units, each student decides which he wishes to take and indicates his choice. Once assigned to a unit, a student consults with the teacher directing the unit and together they outline a learning plan. At the end of this six-week period, all students will choose new topics and develop new learning plans.

The Parcells program, entitled Social Studies Individualized Elective Program, was initiated in the 1968-69 school year as a pilot program for grades six through eight. The program has been in continuous operation since then and presently serves over 700 students in grades seven and eight, the sixth grade having been moved from Parcells. No special funding is allocated for the program, and social studies teachers carry the same class load as other faculty members.

The decision to depart from a traditional curriculum was made by the Parcells social studies teachers in the 1967-68 school year. Robert Roddewig, department chairman, and George Pamerleau, teacher, indicate the decision was a result of the staff's conclusion that the teaching model they were using was "inadequate, irrelevant, and obsolete." They were concerned about a curriculum which did not relate to crucial problems of the modern world, about outdated and outmoded textbooks, and about a learning structure which required all students to learn in the same way and at the same rate. What the staff wanted was a "really 'new,' new social studies program." They wanted a curriculum that emerged from a new set of beliefs about learning, the nature of youth, and the needs of the community--not a curriculum whose "covert purpose was to make teachers comfortable."

In time the teachers developed a completely new social studies program based on seven principles:

1. *The curriculum must be flexible, open-ended, and self-renewing.*
2. *Youth have the most important rights in the process of education.*
3. *Learners require different amounts of time and different kinds of experiences to learn the same things.*
4. *The school must help youth to develop adaptive skills.*
5. *The school has important responsibilities for attitude formation.*
6. *A teacher cannot be all things to all youth. He must combine resources with other teachers.*
7. *The use of grade levels is an outmoded practice that probably never did make sense.*

INDIVIDUALIZED ELECTIVE PROGRAM

The Parcells program consists of 40 six-week units covering a broad range of topics in the areas of geography and United States history. Some of the unit titles include "Islands of the World," "Man as an Explorer," "Consumer Education," "World War II," "Factors of Character Development," and "Understanding Canada." A complete list of units presently in the Parcells curriculum can be seen on the last page. All major content areas of the former traditional curriculum are included, plus many new areas of study; there are no required units of study. Any student in grades seven or eight may choose any of the units.

The study units vary not only in content but also in style and learning activities. Some have core studies for all the students, followed by quest (independent research) activities for individuals or small groups. Several units emphasize problem solving; others are based on simulation games. Another option open to the students is Independent Study, a plan which allows a student to pursue a topic of special interest to him not included in the formal offerings.

Approximately 40% of the units contain several plans for learning--usually five. The plans differ from one another in the following ways: (1) level of difficulty, (2) level of student responsibility in planning, (3) media and resources for learning, (4) learning style, and (5) activity

PROFILES OF PROMISE are descriptive brochures that highlight innovative social studies and social education practices, which teachers and administrators can easily adapt to their own classrooms or schools.

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choices. These plans are designed to accommodate all levels of student ability, maturity, and interest.

When a student makes his choice of units at the beginning of each six-week period, he may select from a battery of four to six units; the number of offerings each period depends on staff availability. Students are asked to indicate their first, second, and third choice of units, and teachers make assignments on the basis of these choices. The staff balances the groups, recognizing the great majority of first choices and never placing a student in his third choice without consulting him.

If a student selects a unit which has several learning plans, he meets with his unit teacher to decide which learning plan he will follow. They discuss his past performance and present goals, then determine the learning plan best suited for him. When student and teacher are in agreement, the student completes the following contract form:

> *I agree to work toward the successful completion of Study Plan Number____. I have selected the above Study Plan after careful consideration of all Study Plans used in this unit of study and only because it is the most interesting and challenging plan for me. I understand that I am expected to complete all of the work in this unit, including the activity choices that I select, to the best of my ability.*

IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM

To implement the Individualized Elective Program it was first necessary to arrange the social studies teachers' schedules to enable them to function as a team and to interchange responsibilities.

No major renovation of the building was necessary, but space was used in new ways. The physical facility housing the program now consists of a library comfortably seating 45 and functioning as a quiet area; a social studies resource center--actually a converted study hall--seating 85 cozily, and operating as a "noisy" area for group work; and a classroom where small group discussions can be held. The physical complex makes it possible for one teacher to manage 30 students in the library, another to supervise 45 in the resource center, and the other to lead ten students in a small group discussion. Students move from area to area, depending on their learning plans, and teachers shift responsibilities according to a team schedule.

Teachers believe the key to the program is the multi-materials resource complex which includes the social studies resource center, the school library, and a branch of the public library housed in the school building. In purchasing materials for the program, the staff chose not to buy large quantities of a single textbook but instead bought limited quantities of many sets of books and materials. The resource center currently has over 70 sets of books available to students; filmstrips, tapes, and records provide additional variety in resource materials.

At the beginning of a six-week period each teacher assumes primary responsibility for one or two units. It becomes the teacher's duty to administer to the needs of the students enrolled in those units. The teachers also work closely as a team, and Roddewig reports that teachers often work with students studying other units. For example, a teacher with a special background or skill might function as a resource person for another teacher. In this way teachers are always working in areas of strength and interest.

Teachers also work as a team in evaluating students. In making their judgments, the teachers use their own observations of oral and written work; however, they also incorporate student self-evaluation and peer-evaluation. Teachers have designed specific evaluation forms for use by students.

Students are graded at the completion of each unit and given an Individual Progress Report. The report is based on a one-to-four scale with "one" representing superior work and "four" representing little or no progress. Teachers evaluate students in the following areas: (1) group achievement level, (2) individual achievement level, (3) work habits, and (4) citizenship. Progress Reports are sent to parents each six weeks, but teachers maintain more frequent contact with parents through telephone conferences.

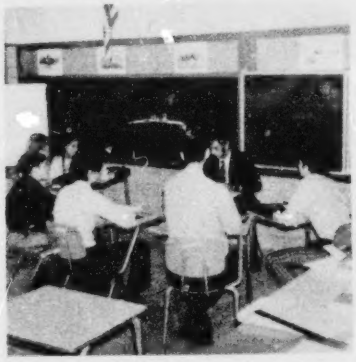
STUDY UNITS

At the heart of the Individualized Elective Program are the study units. Once a student is enrolled in a unit, he is presented with a set of instructions which explain the responsibilities and timetable for that unit. He knows the exact scope and expectations of the unit from the first day of the six-week period.

Accompanying the general instructions are specific directions for each activity, vocabulary lists, bibliographies of materials available in the resource center, suggestions for additional activities, and, in some units, self-evaluation forms to be completed at the end of the unit. Some students receive the entire packet of materials at the beginning of the unit; other students are given new materials as their work on the unit progresses.

Study units are designed to heighten student interest and learning. The variety of subjects and the fresh approach to the subject matter appeals to the junior high student. The following descriptions of representative units show some of their diversity in scope and style.

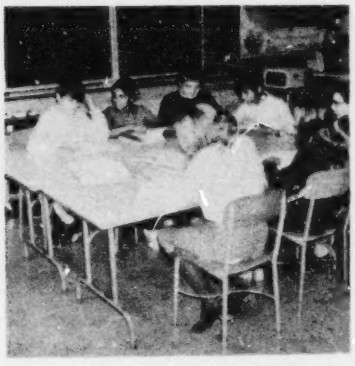
Study units may require...



Small group discussion

Independent work

In the resource center...



Youngsters work on a group project

Students use cente

A structured approach

on special projects

Students receive help

's audio equipment

AGRICULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNITED STATES

Agricultural Geography is an unusual subject for a school in a vast metropolitan area, but it was developed at the suggestion of Parcells students. Roddewig recalls that the teachers had no materials to draw on when the unit was first taught three years ago; two of the social studies teachers were raised on farms so their knowledge was utilized in developing the unit. During the six-week period students study geographical and climatic considerations in agriculture, basic information about farming and ranching, and some of the economic problems involved in modern-day agriculture. The unit is semi-structured, requiring all students to complete certain activities in the first weeks but allowing them to work on individual projects in the final weeks.

DECISION MAKING

The goal of this unit is to acquaint students with the process of decision making by studying periods of American history in which important decisions have been made. After investigating historical instances of important decision making, students are asked to select one contemporary issue to study, such as "Should the voting age be lowered?" They are to investigate various sources of information, explore all the possible solutions, consider the possible consequences of solutions, and finally make their own decision. This unit is completely individualized.

GEOGRAPHY OF CITIES

Living in the fifth largest metropolitan area in the country, Parcells students have a particular need to understand some of the geographical concepts of cities--why cities are located where they are, how cities are laid out, how the geography of a city affects its inhabitants. The unit is built around 18 activities from which students choose 12 to complete. When five or six students turn in step "A," the teacher schedules these students for a small group discussion on the content of what they have studied. If a student completes 12 activities before the end of the six-week period, he may build his own quest project based on what he has learned in the unit.

SEARCH FOR EARLY MAN

Search for Early Man is such a popular unit at Parcells that it is offered at least twice a year. The investigative approach of the unit requires students to use an extensive group of anthropology materials in preparing reports on subjects such as "Where did our early ancestors come from?" "What did they look like?" and "How old is man?" Students also read case studies from anthropological materials and discuss the implications in groups.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Political Parties is taught every other year at election time in order to capitalize on the natural interest of the students in upcoming elections. The unit includes a variety of activities, beginning with a simulation game in which students form political parties, hold an election, set up a legislature, and pass bills. Students also participate in problem-solving activities and small group investigations. The unit is reviewed and updated each time it is offered.

COLONIAL AMERICA

Because Colonial America is taken by many students, Parcells teachers have developed five different learning plans for approaching the material. A student is counseled into the plan which best suits his needs and abilities. Basically the plans range from a highly structured, conceptual analysis approach to a plan for independent research in which a student completes a depth study of a concept of special interest to him.

WORLD CULTURES

When a Parcells teacher who normally instructs homemaking was assigned part-time to the social studies department, the staff decided to utilize her talents--and homemaking room--by developing a unit on World Cultures. During the six-week period, students prepared foreign food, viewed slides and movies, and studied foreign arts and crafts. Parents with special knowledge of foreign cultures served as guest speakers. The unit concluded with an ethnic festival for which each student selected a country, chose a typical food from its culture, and prepared the dish. The unit was so successful that it is scheduled to be offered again soon.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

To encourage highly motivated and self-directed students to undertake projects of special interest to them, the Parcells social studies department offers an Independent Study option to students. Generally the Independent Study projects are outside the regular unit offerings, although some units such as Decision Making have independent study plans built into them.

If a student is interested in Independent Study, he lists Independent Study as his first choice on the elective form at the beginning of a six-week period. Teachers review the form and either approve or disapprove the student's request on the basis of his past record of self-direction, industry, self-discipline, and motivation. A maximum of four Independent Study students are approved for each class period, and one teacher is assigned to direct each group of four. In any six-week period there are normally 15 to 20 students enrolled in Independent Study.

The group director meets with each student to determine the study project he will undertake and the feasibility of the project in terms of time and resources. Parental approval for Independent Study is sought by phone or letter. To formalize the project plans, students are required to (1) list their topic, (2) explain what they intend to do and how they intend to proceed, (3) explain what they intend to learn by the study, and (4) develop

a bibliography of materials available for their study.

When the student's project proposal is approved by the director, the student proceeds with the study. All students engaged in Independent Study meet twice weekly by appointment with the director to review their progress, discuss problems, and receive guidance. The director and student mutually decide how a final evaluation is to be made. Roddewig reports that students generally work so diligently on their independent study that most receive straight "one" ratings on the final evaluations.

Some students who select Independent Study spend their time in free reading programs which deal with special aspects of social studies, such as minority problems. The school librarian aids these students in building their bibliographies, and the director and student spend their appointment time discussing the books' content and meaning.

One eighth grade student with a special interest in architecture chose to do an Independent Study project on the styles of architecture found in the Grosse Pointe-Detroit area. After determining the research techniques and format of his project with his director, the student spent six weeks collecting slides and other data to demonstrate the architectural styles he found. The culminating activity of the project was a slide-tape presentation given for his classmates. The student then presented his materials to the school system to be placed in the resource center for use by teachers and students.

TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTION VS. THE INDIVIDUALIZED ELECTIVE PROGRAM

The Individualized Elective Program at Parcells Middle School has been in use for three years. Based on the experience of those three years, the teachers involved in the program have summarized the components they feel necessary in changing from a traditional to an individualized elective program.

1) The teachers must develop their own schedules.
No school-wide, inflexible schedule which is planned during the summer can predict needs that emerge during the year. The most flexible, efficient schedule is one which assigns a group of students to a team of teachers for a block of time.

2) Teachers must change their roles.
Teachers can no longer think of themselves as "information pushers" or the sole decision makers. They must become program planners, diagnosticians, advisors, prescribers, counselors, resource people, consultants, and joint evaluators.

3) Building space must be rearranged.
This does not always mean that walls must be knocked down. It does mean that existing facilities should be used differently.

4) New curriculum materials must be designed.
The single textbook must be replaced by multiple copies of a variety of materials which are continuously updated.

How does the Individualized Elective Program compare with the traditional social studies curriculum used at Parcells before 1969? Roddewig makes these comparisons. Students have received the new program enthusiastically. They like having a choice about what they study: they like variety in how they learn; they enjoy having several teachers during a year's time; and they like being able to move from the library to the classroom to the resource center. The variety and self-renewing qualities of the program have even eliminated the age-old problem of spring fever--the kids just don't get bored.

Students are not the only ones who get bored in a confining curriculum, and Parcells teachers have found their own interest level rising with that of the students. Like the students, the teachers enjoy teaching a variety of subjects, having some physical mobility, and seeing a new crop of faces every six weeks. They also appreciate being able to teach in their areas of strength and interest. "As a matter of fact," concludes Roddewig, "the new program has made coming to school really fun--for both teachers and students."

ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 081 849 - Reporting to Parents When Individualizing Instruction. 6 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. Methods and forms are described that are in use for reporting student progress and performance to parents at a junior high school with varying degrees of individualized instruction in each subject.

ED 081 180 - Project 80. Learning Activity Packages. Final Report, 1971. 82 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$5.29. This document describes the development of individualized instruction programs and Learning Activity Packages at Decatur High School in Federal Way, Washington.

ED 074 711 - Gains in Self Esteem as a Result of an Individualized Curriculum. Preliminary Report. 9 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. Preliminary results of a research study indicate that six months with an individualized instruction curriculum greatly increased self-esteem among elementary school children.

ED 072 430 - Nongraded Quarter Selectives: Mini-Guidelines for Mini-Courses. 12 pp. MF-$.65, HC-$3.29. Designed for language arts, this guide can also be used for other courses. The author discusses ground rules that appear to be necessary for a school to incorporate mini-courses, and presents detailed suggestions of steps to follow in the process of preparing a new curriculum.

STUDY UNITS

American Indian
Islands of the World
A Study of Northern Europe
Peoples and Cultures of Australia
Peoples and Cultures of Asia
Peoples and Cultures of Latin America
Peoples and Cultures of Africa
Understanding Canada
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